

## FOLK ART OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIA

be bleached, a complicated series of processes whose final result transformed it from its natural brown hue into something only a little lighter. After it was taken from the loom, it was subjected to at least twenty more bleaching operations, involving baths in a decoction of wood ashes, alternating with baths in sunlight and then in buttermilk, until it approached the standard of whiteness the housewife considered necessary for her best linens.

A loom was an essential part of all early households. The women of the family were expected to operate it until travel conditions improved sufficiently to enable itinerant weavers to move about from farm to farm, hiring out their services to help with the weaving. In a surviving account book of one such itinerant we find the scale of prices for 1726: "John Lederach's flaxen cloth is 36 yards @ sixpence per yard. The price of tow cloth which I made is 15 yards and a half at 5 pence. 30 yards of tow and 21 yards of flax for Jacob Garman."

Eventually, the time came when all this interminable work began to pile up as surplus. Women, by their own efforts, by inheritance and by the purchase of other women's weaving at country sales, now had a reserve of fabric on hand, stowed away in their dower chests. The hardest part of the life of the early settlers was behind them, and they had time to think of something besides the sternest necessities. Now the fine fields were cleared, the great stone barns built; the roads, once woodland trails, had been opened up and improved, so that it was possible to get to the city, where there was material already woven, of a quality unknown to them. If the head of the family could be wheedled into it, these wonderful, fine cloths were purchased. Though it occurred only rarely, a few women managed to get some stuffs they did not have to make themselves, and the helpless male who permitted these purchases complained in a letter to the paper of his choice, the "*Philadelphische Correspondenz*," in 1781, about the desire for the luxuries of life at that time.

Our correspondent's plaint might well be summarized here. In 1741, for him the "good old days," his capital had consisted of two suits of homespun clothes, four pairs of socks, four linen shirts, and two pairs of shoes. These had been given to him by the farmer for whom he had worked from the age of twelve to twenty-one. He then married, and rented a farm of forty acres. At thirty-two, he had saved enough to buy a sixty-acre farm. As he made more money, he bought more land; thus he could present his first daughter who married with a farm and the flax to do her own spinning, as already mentioned. He spent no money unnecessarily, so the wedding portion of the first daughter was one that we can be sure met with his approval. At this time, apart from taxes, his annual expenses were not more than \$10, and he was putting away \$150 every year in his strong box. He bought cattle, fattened them for market, made more and more money, so that he was even able to put it out at interest.

Then, he wails, a change came over his way of living, for by this time his women folk evidently took an interest in the excess profits and decided to have a share in them. When